

CLAIMS

1 1. A method for securely sending an electronic message to
2 multiple recipients, the method comprising:

3 (a) receiving an indication of an encrypted electronic message to
4 be sent to multiple recipient users;

5 (b) storing a single copy of the electronic message;

6 (c) creating a notification electronic message including a reference
7 to the electronic message;

8 (d) sending a copy of the notification electronic message to each
9 of the recipient users; and

10 upon receiving a request from a recipient user for the referenced
11 electronic message,

12 (e) decrypting the received encrypted electronic message;

13 (f) retrieving an encryption key for the recipient user;

14 (g) encrypting a copy of the decrypted electronic message
15 with the retrieved encryption key; and

16 (h) sending the encrypted copy to the recipient user for
17 temporary storage while the sent encrypted copy is reviewed.

1 2. The method of claim 1 including:

2 under the control of the server, when it is determined that an
3 encrypted copy of the electronic message has been sent to all of the recipient users,
4 deleting the stored single copy of the electronic message.

1 3. The method of claim 1 including:

2 under the control of the server, when it is determined that an
3 encrypted copy of the electronic message has been sent to all of the recipient users

4 and that none of the recipient users have indicated that the electronic message is to
5 be saved, deleting the stored single copy of the electronic message.

1 4. The method of claim 1 including:
2 under the control of the server, when it is determined that a specified
3 period of time after the sending of the notification electronic messages has expired,
4 deleting the stored single copy of the electronic message.

1 5. The method of claim 1 wherein contents of the notification
2 electronic message consist of the reference to the received electronic message, an
3 identification of a sender of the electronic message, and a subject of the electronic
4 message.

1 6. The method of claim 1 including retrieving message sending
2 instructions for a recipient user, and wherein the sending of the copy of the
3 notification electronic message to that recipient user is performed according to the
4 message sending instructions.

1 7. The method of claim 6 wherein the retrieved message sending
2 instructions specify types of information to be included in the notification electronic
3 message sent to that recipient user, and wherein the copy of the notification
4 electronic message to be sent to that recipient user includes the specified types of
5 information.

1 8. The method of claim 1 wherein for at least one recipient user,
2 before the copy of the notification electronic message is sent to the at least one
3 recipient user, the copy is encrypted with the encryption key for the at least one
4 recipient user.

1 9. The method of claim 1 wherein the recipient user is unable to
2 permanently store the electronic message.

1 10. The method of claim 1 wherein steps (a)-(h) are performed
2 under control of a server computer, and including:

3 before the receiving of the indication, under control of a sending
4 computer,

5 receiving an indication of the electronic message;

6 retrieving an encryption key for the server computer, the server
7 encryption key distinct from the retrieved encryption key for the recipient user;

8 encrypting the electronic message with the retrieved server
9 encryption key; and

10 sending the encrypted electronic message to the server
11 computer.

1 11. A computer-implemented method for sending an electronic
2 communication to recipients, the method comprising:

3 receiving an indication of an electronic communication and of at least
4 one recipient to receive the electronic communication;

5 determining whether multiple recipients of the electronic
6 communication have been indicated; and

7 when it is determined that multiple recipients have been indicated,

8 storing the electronic communication;

9 notifying each of the multiple recipients of the electronic
10 communication without sending the electronic communication to the recipients; and

11 in response to a request for the electronic communication from
12 a recipient, sending the electronic communication to the recipient.

1 12. The method of claim 11 including:
2 when it is determined that multiple recipients have not been indicated,
3 sending the electronic communication to the recipient without
4 waiting for a request for the electronic communication.

1 13. The method of claim 11 including:
2 tracking the sending of the electronic communication to the
3 recipients; and
4 when the electronic communication has been sent to all of the
5 recipients, deleting the stored electronic communication.

1 14. The method of claim 11 including:
2 when it is determined that the electronic communication has been sent
3 to all of the recipients and that none of the recipients have indicated that the
4 electronic communication is to be saved, deleting the stored electronic
5 communication.

1 15. The method of claim 11 including:
2 when it is determined that the electronic communication has been sent
3 to all of the recipients and that all of the recipients have indicated that the electronic
4 communication can be deleted, deleting the stored electronic communication.

1 16. The method of claim 11 including:
2 determining a period of time for which the electronic communication
3 will be stored; and
4 when the determined period of time has expired, deleting the stored
5 electronic communication.

1 17. The method of claim 11 wherein the notifying of a recipient of
2 the electronic communication involves sending a distinct indicator electronic
3 communication to the recipient.

1 18. The method of claim 11 including retrieving notifying
2 instructions for a recipient, and wherein the notifying of the recipient is performed
3 according to the notifying instructions.

1 19. The method of claim 18 wherein the notifying instructions are
2 supplied by a sender of the electronic communication.

1 20. The method of claim 18 wherein the notifying instructions are
2 supplied by the recipient.

1 21. The method of claim 18 wherein the notifying instructions are
2 determined automatically based on past interactions with the recipient.

1 22. The method of claim 18 wherein the notifying instructions
2 indicate that the notifying is to be performed in an encrypted manner.

1 23. A computer-implemented method for sending an electronic
2 communication to a plurality of recipients, the method comprising:
3 receiving an indication of the electronic communication and of the
4 plurality of recipients to receive the electronic communication;
5 storing a single copy of the electronic communication;
6 notifying each of the recipients of the electronic communication
7 without sending the electronic communication to the recipients; and
8 in response to a request for the electronic communication from a
9 recipient, sending the electronic communication to the recipient.

1 24. The method of claim 23 including:
2 tracking the requests for the electronic communication from the
3 recipients; and
4 after all of the recipients have requested the electronic
5 communication, deleting the stored electronic communication.

1 25. The method of claim 24 wherein the deleting is performed only
2 when none of the recipients desire continuing access to the electronic
3 communication.

1 26. The method of claim 23 including automatically sending the
2 electronic communication to a non-recipient authorized to access the electronic
3 communication.

1 27. The method of claim 23 including retrieving sending
2 instructions for a recipient, and wherein the sending of the electronic
3 communication is performed according to the sending instructions.

1 28. The method of claim 27 wherein the sending instructions are
2 supplied by a sender of the electronic communication.

1 29. The method of claim 27 wherein the sending instructions
2 indicate that the sending is to be performed in an encrypted manner.

1 30. A computer-implemented method for one of a plurality of
2 designated recipients of an electronic communication to receive the electronic
3 communication from a server that stores a single copy of the electronic
4 communication, the method comprising:

5 receiving an electronic communication notification from the server
6 that references the single copy of the electronic communication, the electronic
7 communication notification distinct from the electronic communication;

8 requesting from the server the referenced electronic communication;
9 and

10 receiving from the server a copy of the requested electronic
11 communication.

1 31. The method of claim 30 including:

2 when access to the electronic communication is no longer desired,
3 indicating to the server to delete the electronic communication, so that the server
4 deletes the single stored copy of the electronic communication after receiving
5 indications from all recipients to delete the electronic communication.

1 32. The method of claim 31 including:

2 after the receiving of the electronic communication notification,
3 storing the electronic communication notification locally; and

4 after the indicating to the server to delete the electronic
5 communication, deleting the stored electronic communication notification even if
6 all recipients have not indicated to delete the electronic communication.

1 33. The method of claim 31 including storing the electronic
2 communication locally such that the local stored electronic communication is
3 preserved even when the server deletes the single stored copy.

1 34. The method of claim 30 wherein the electronic communication
2 received from the server is encrypted using a public encryption key for the one of
3 the plurality of designated recipients, and including retrieving a private encryption
4 key for the one of the plurality of designated recipients to decrypt the electronic
5 communication.

1 35. The method of claim 30 wherein the method is performed by a
2 receiving computer lacking sufficient permanent storage to store the electronic
3 communication.

1 36. The method of claim 30 wherein contents of the received
2 electronic communication notification are based on preferences for the one of the
3 plurality of designated recipients, the preferences previously supplied to the server.

1 37. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for
2 controlling a computer system to send an electronic communication to recipients
3 by:

4 receiving an indication of an electronic communication and of at least
5 one recipient to receive the electronic communication;

6 determining whether multiple recipients of the electronic
7 communication have been indicated; and

8 when it is determined that multiple recipients have been indicated,

9 storing the electronic communication;

10 notifying each of the multiple recipients of the electronic
11 communication without sending the electronic communication to the recipients; and

12 in response to a request for the electronic communication from
13 a recipient, sending the electronic communication to the recipient.

1 38. The computer-readable medium of claim 37 wherein the
2 computer system is further controlled by:
3 when it is determined that multiple recipients have not been indicated,
4 sending the electronic communication to the recipient without
5 waiting for a request for the electronic communication.

1 39. The computer-readable medium of claim 37 wherein the
2 computer system is further controlled by:
3 tracking the sending of the electronic communication to the
4 recipients; and
5 when the electronic communication has been sent to all of the
6 recipients, deleting the stored electronic communication.

1 40. The computer-readable medium of claim 37 wherein the
2 computer system is further controlled:
3 when it is determined that the electronic communication has been sent
4 to all of the recipients and that the electronic communication has not been indicated
5 to be saved by any of the recipients, deleting the stored electronic communication.

1 41. A computer system for sending an electronic communication
2 to recipients, comprising:
3 a communication distributor for receiving an indication of the
4 electronic communication and of at least one recipient to receive the electronic
5 communication, for determining whether multiple recipients of the electronic
6 communication have been indicated, for storing the electronic communication and
7 notifying each of the multiple recipients of the electronic communication without
8 sending the electronic communication to the recipients when it is determined that
9 multiple recipients have been indicated, and for sending the electronic

10 communication to a recipient in response to a request for the electronic
11 communication from the recipient.

1 42. The computer system of claim 41 wherein the communication
2 distributor is further for sending the electronic communication to a single recipient
3 without waiting for a request for the electronic communication when it is
4 determined that multiple recipients have not been indicated.

1 43. The computer system of claim 42, further comprising:
2 a communication tracker for tracking the sending of the electronic
3 communication to the recipients, and for deleting the stored electronic
4 communication when the electronic communication has been sent to all of the
5 recipients.

1 44. The computer system of claim 43, further comprising:
2 a communication tracker for deleting the stored electronic
3 communication when it is determined that the electronic communication has been
4 sent to all of the recipients and that that the electronic communication has not been
5 indicated to be saved by any of the recipients.